

COSTUME IN GREEK CLASSIC DRAMA

fabric must prove fine enough to be pulled through a ring taken from a king's finger.

We must not be inflexible about the actual construction of classic costume, but it is possible to find one or two governing factors that make the whole problem easier to understand. Generally speaking, classic costume as worn from the Attic period until the time of the Roman Empire was comparatively sim-

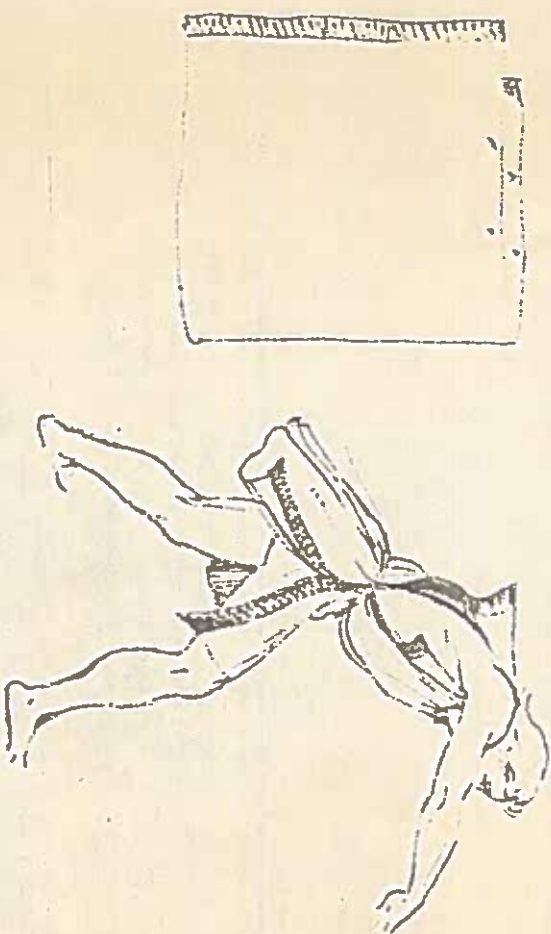


Fig. 2. Doric chiton without fold

ple, although there is a rich variety of superficial small garments that tend to complicate the general effect. The accepted terms of definition applied to the *chiton*, or main dress, are Doric and Ionic; this divides them according to two of the main orders in architecture, which were developed by the two leading racial groups, Ionian Greeks and Dorian Greeks. The Doric was severely simple; the Ionic a trifle more complicated, as indeed the Ionic is in every sense.

Taking the Doric chiton first, we find that it was a straight, unsewn piece of material, wrapped around the body and pinned on the shoulders. The material

TEXTILES AND CIVIL ATTIRE

could be of almost any width, from a yard up to about three yards, but it was probably not wider than three yards (see Fig. 2).

The width of the woven material formed the line from neck to hem, and the length of the material went round the body. Therefore, the wider the fabric

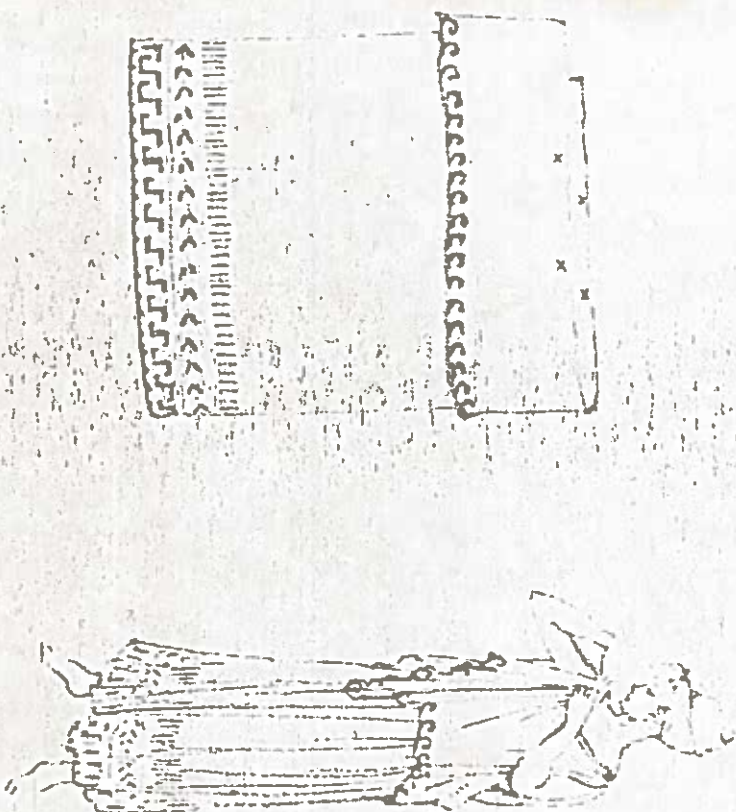


Fig. 3. Doric chiton with top fold

the longer the gown. Thus whenever Homer mentions "double-width" he means that the robe was luxuriously long, possibly even trailing on the ground. The method of wearing it differed only in the adjustment of the width to suit the wearer. If the material is folded in half and two pins inserted half a yard from either end, the head can then be put through the space between the pins and the chiton will fall from the shoulders suspended by the pins, open at

the right side with a folded loop under the left arm (see Fig. 2). A girdle holds the garment in position. This is the simplest form and is worn by working and fighting men and sometimes by serving women. The more usual feminine,

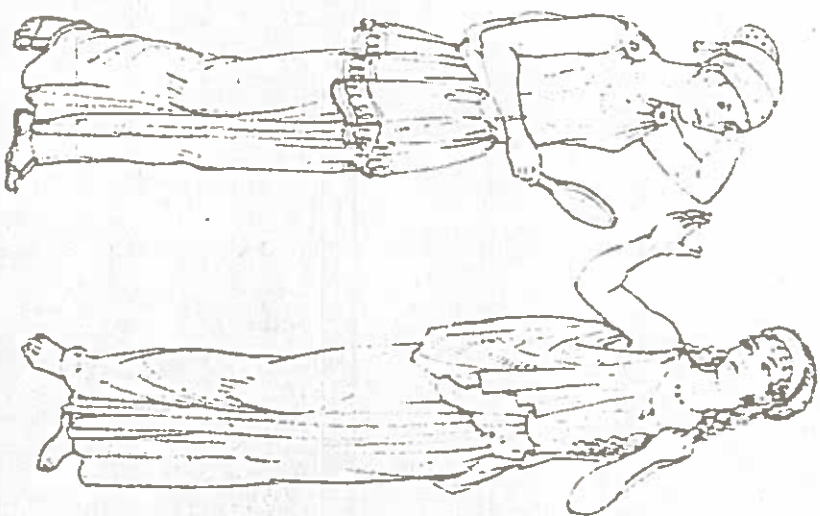


Fig. 4. Two different arrangements of the Doric chiton

decorative style is to fold over the top of the chiton before inserting the pins so that a hanging drapery falls from the pins and shows the (probably decorated) top or border of the material hanging over the chest like a collar.

The placing of the girdle is an entirely personal matter. Should the chiton be very long, which fashion normally occurs for women only, there may be

two girdles worn, one high up under the breasts, and one at the waist. The extra material swings out under the lower girdle. Generally speaking, the Doric version is simple. The pins were long and pointed like little daggers with a decorated end. Apparently they were, on occasion, used as such, and served in emergencies as small weapons of defence.

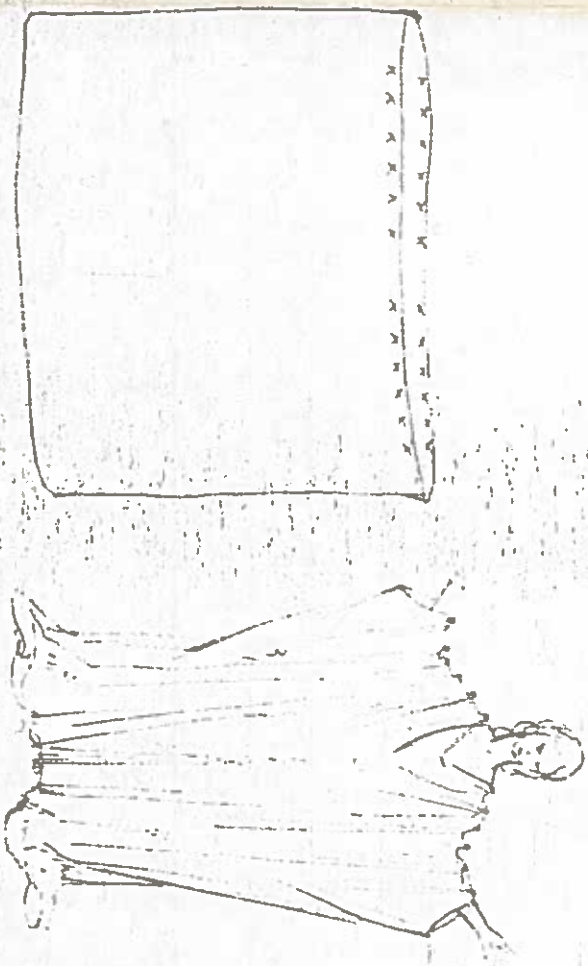


Fig. 5. Ionic chiton

The Ionic chiton is much fuller than the Doric (i.e. the material has the same width but is longer), and is sewn up like a vast unshaped skirt. To put it on, one of the open edges should be pinned at regular intervals leaving a slightly larger interval for the head to go through. The hands are then put through between the last pin at each end and the fold in the fabric. This will form a sort of long sleeve with the pins decorating the arm, and permitting the material to fall open between them, showing the bare arm. About five yards of length is required to give the right effect (see Figs. 5 & 7). Again, it can be girdled as desired. The girdle itself will help to pleat the skirt.

Care should be exercised in the choice of fabrics used; we can assume that

the majority of these chitons were originally made from very fine wool. This would give them the full beauty of the softly flowing draperies. The easiest type of modern fabric with which to experiment is a fine jersey type which,

because of its weight, falls much better than any sort of cotton or than most of the synthetic fabrics.

These Ionic chitons were frequently pleated. The pleating could have been done in a manner similar to broomstick pleating, which is still the most economical method of pleating real silk. The silk is folded tightly when wet and wound around a straight stick till it is dry; when dry, the pleats remain in place until the material is washed again. This could only be done with a perfectly straight length of material with no flares or cutting on the cross because of the stretching involved. If this very simple method had been used in the fifth century it would account for the arrangement of groups of little pleats, and again groups of larger ones, a form which is so very effective in the clear calligraphic drawings on Greek vases.

No doubt many of the lovely drawings that fascinate one by their pleated fantasy were not so exaggerated as we might believe, from looking at them.

One little figure in the British Museum showing Theseus slaying the Minotaur has fascinated me for many years because of the figure an experiment in broomstick pleating was carried out. A length of material about six yards long and forty-two inches wide was used. When this came off the broom it was easy to handle. The top could be turned down over a cord arranged around the shoulder.

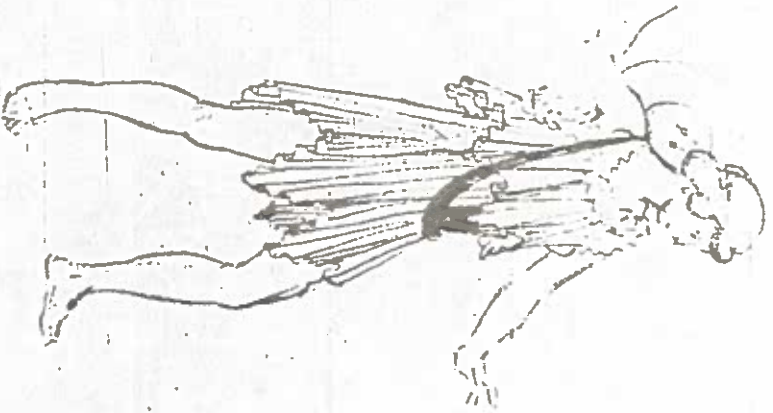


Fig. 6, Theseus

ders, and after a deal of fiddling it was discovered that as long as there was sufficient material, the chevron edge could be achieved and pinned into place on the cord, so that however much movement was carried out the hemline

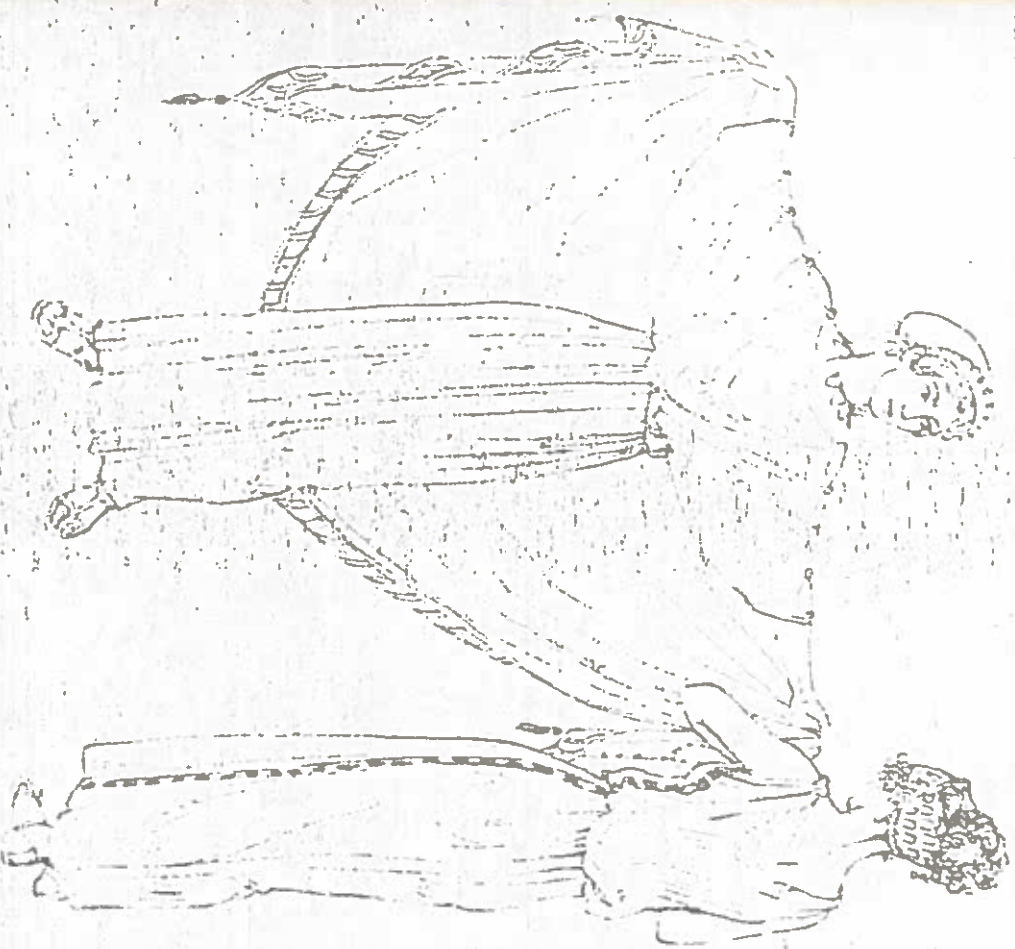


Fig. 7, Ionic chiton and himation. Ionic chiton sewn up at side.

remained the same, fuller wherever it was lifted than at its deeper points. The Greek artists boggled at the detailed drawing of the complicated pleated fold around the cord and under the arms. In their simplified rendering such a fold is turned into what appears to us to be some separate edge. Possibly the same effect could be achieved from a length of material with both sides chevroned, but there would not be the same depth and variety of fold on the lifted or dropped hem.

It is difficult for us to realize that experiment in hanging and drapery was of more interest to the Greek artists than just making use of a piece of material and turning up a hem, as we are prone to do. The lesson might be learned from them that hems are a nuisance and that a properly woven selvage edge, as long as the material is not too diaphanous, must be straight. It is also probable that weights were used to assist the correct hanging of some of these garments. We know that such weights, designed as tassels or drops, decorate the points of hinations, also that fringe, the natural finish to any length of woven material, appears on quite a number of garments. The pleated edge which is left free between the pins or brooches down the shoulders makes a lovely serrated scallop pattern which also looks most attractive in the drawings but would set a real problem for a designer who wished to reproduce such an effect.

A description of what sounds uncommonly like an Ionic chiton can be found in Book XVIII of the *Odyssey*, when Penelope is brought gifts from her suitors. Whether this particular gown was known in Homer's time is debatable, but this indicates so very clearly something of the sort that it would seem to fit very well and might have been a copyist's idea: "... For Antinous they brought a long embroidered robe of the most beautiful material on which were fixed a dozen golden brooches, each fitted with a curved sheath for the pin". The twelve golden brooches would seem to be the six pins which appear on each arm. These pins were sheathed, an important improvement on the original dagger type of pin; they were also already on the robe, so that in a sense it was made up and therefore a finished garment ready to wear.

When putting on the chiton care should be taken that the main fullness is at the front and at the back, not at the sides. This arrangement gives the hips a clean smooth line, leaving the folds at the front and back to swing gracefully from the

girdle when moving, and to hang in a series of straight lines when standing still.

The upper part, above the girdle, should be lifted at the sides until the "hem-line" is even and then swagged over the girdle under the arms. Normally if the material is sufficiently soft and weighing this will give an effective series of V-shaped folds on the chest pulling from the pins on the shoulders and accentuating a slightly clinging effect on the breasts only. This obviously was the fashionable contour to be achieved by women.

The normal male form of Ionic chiton is short, with perhaps only two or three pins on each shoulder so that the sleeve rarely reaches the elbow. When men wear the full style already described it would seem that its use in illustration was to define special characters. Either the man is elderly, inactive or regal, or else the figure represents the god Dionysus, who is so frequently accused of being feminine. Therefore we may assume that the Doric form is the more masculine.

One instance only appears when this garment is adapted so that it may serve a more practical purpose than that possible when pins are used; this occurs when, instead of the pins on each shoulder, a strap or band of embroidery is sewn on the left side connecting the front to the back, leaving a folded sway under the left arm and completely freeing the right side down to the waist where the garment is held in place by a belt or girdle. Such an arrangement is used when warriors are shown in action and this appears on both relief figures as well as paintings. It is worn by both men and Amazons and was quite obviously a form of battle-dress.

Over the chiton was worn a cloak some four or five yards long and about a yard in width. This is known as an *himation* and was arranged and decorated in a variety of styles. The ends were decorated and quite often had a fringe or tassels or some small weight of beads attached at the corners, so that in movement the weight swung away from the body and emphasized the pattern of the border design. It was worn, as all the garments were, by both men and women. There was no distinctive garment peculiar to either sex, though a version of the himation with the lower edge woven in points and the upper edge pleated on to a band worn under the arm and fastened on the opposite shoulder seems to appear far more frequently on women than it does on men. This highly decorative pleated himation is nearly always represented as one of Athens's

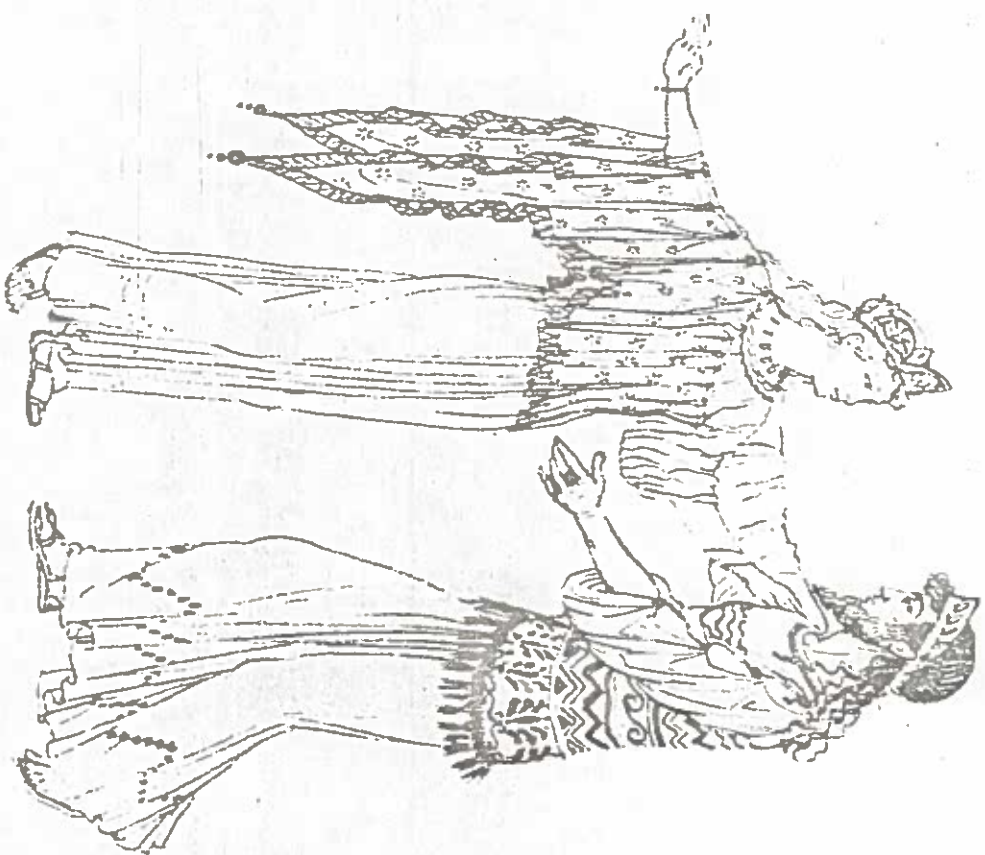


Fig. 28. Regal figures with golden diadems

age; this takes the form of beads or golden drops of simple bold design and they appear not only in the obvious capacity of earrings, but as the weights or tassels on the points of himations, their purpose to help the draperies to hang in the appropriate series of folds which is so very much a part of all Greek dress. Again, these same tassels or drops are attached to the girdles and many of the fillets worn around the head. They appear so frequently in design that they are at once a noticeable feature of the dress.

Brooches, pins and fibulae are the ornaments that secure the dress and these vary as much as any other item of ornament. Again they cannot be ignored because they are part of both the Doric and the Ionic chiton as well as being the only means of securing the himation.

Bracelets and rings appear in some considerable profusion amongst archaeological findings, but it would be useless to expect that a ring could have very much dramatic significance in the ancient theatre, though bracelets do appear on the arms of queens and great ladies.

Again, for identification purposes jewellery can be significant, though here we must face up to the fact that the majority of Greek jewellery was insignificant in size, apart from the very lovely diadems and crowns; it was its delicacy that made it remarkable.

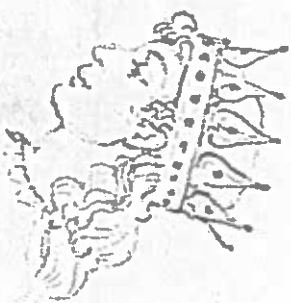
Theatrically such crowns served a dual purpose: to distinguish regal characters and to support veils. Those illustrations that depict queens and princesses make a special point of using such crowns, and there is a passage in Euripides' *Hippolytus* where Phaedra asks her nurse to take off her headdress which "... weighs her brow ...". Presumably they were as weighty as they appear in illustrations.

There are few dramatic references to other items of jewellery apart from pins and brooches. There is however the very telling description which is quoted elsewhere in this book about the necklace which Ion wore as a baby (see p. 13). There is certainly significance here and it is quite legitimate to assume that many items of jewellery took the form of charms and symbols.

Although each of these Greek ornaments in itself is a thing of beauty because of its fine craftsmanship, they are not particularly large or showy, certainly nothing in the nature of Byzantine or medieval ornament. Necklaces, for instance, were simple, sometimes only a small chain expressed by a line of dots on the drawings of the time. The tendency was to make them fairly close



Fig. 29. Varieties of crowns and hair arrangements



fitting, with any ornament there was splaying out from the main chain, something resembling leaves or petals linked together on one side only. The accompanying drawings show simple varieties of fifth-century Goldsmiths' work. Crowns and diadems, on the other hand, were most impressive and dignified; the ornament on a queen's head would be at once obvious and regal. The motifs used in the design of all the jewellery stem from the familiar forms. Most of these have already been mentioned in the chapter on fabric design, but we do find the addition of fruits and foreign flowers such as the Assyrian lotus flowers and buds, pomegranates from Sparta, etc. Many of the pins were made from ivory, bone, amber or crystal and not necessarily bronze or precious metals. Certainly crystal appears in quite a number of personal ornaments though there

does seem to be a distinct lack of evidence of the use of coloured stones (apart from amber, which is not a stone!). Earrings which were attached to the ear by a hook usually consisted of hanging drops of stones or golden ornaments some inch or more in length. Two particularly lovely examples with the wheel or flower form at the top appear illustrated below. The use of figures is not unusual and gods or goddesses are represented as often as animal forms. Snakes of gold or bronze are one of the most familiar designs for bracelets, a design so old in time that there seems to be no origin for it. All other bracelets appear to be narrow and nothing like the wide oriental bracelets. Delicacy and fragility are the main qualities to be observed, so that in dressing a play some care should be exercised in this respect. Normal theatre jewellery tends to be barbaric and over-emphasized because it is usually intended to express grandeur. The Greek illustrator never uses this particular form of expression.

The subject as a whole is a highly specialized one and many scholars and archaeologists have given us detailed descriptions of their findings:

In any modern production the question inevitably arises as to what sort of jewellery can be worn. Each actress concerned would perhaps like to wear her string of pearls or some other gew-gaw. We must impose some sort of limit. I would suggest that we confine ourselves to the sort of ornament that could have been made from the materials that were available to the fifth-century craftsman.

For anyone with facilities to do so, a visit to the British Museum could be most rewarding, for here are necklaces and pins in variety. Otherwise, discretion must be exercised in the choice of any sort of ornament.

One other aspect of personal ornament which does concern us and cannot

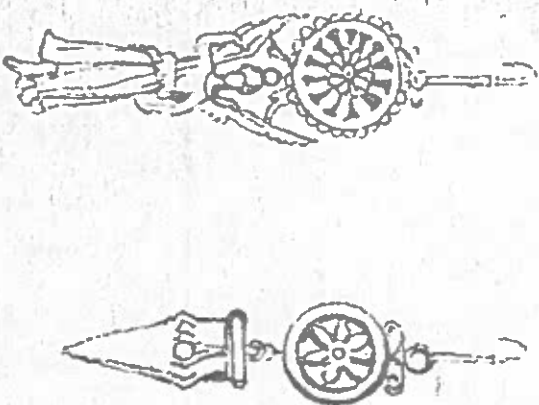


Fig. 30. Golden earrings from Herakleum Museum, Crete

really be placed under the heading of jewelry is that of such things as fans, hand-mirrors and sunshades. All of these apparently modern concerns are to be found in the illustrations of the day, and they could be of use in certain scenes that do require such props. Their correct use is sometimes something of a

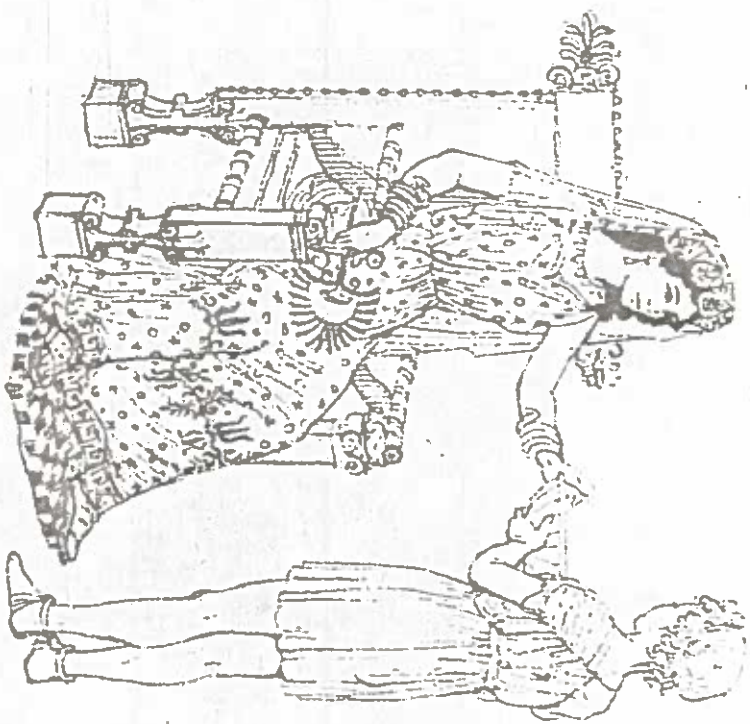


Fig. 31. Royal female figure with snake bracelets, crown, earrings, necklace and fan

problem. It is doubtful, for instance, if ladies habitually carried fans. We see pictures of seated queens with fans in their hands, or slaves using fans to cool their mistresses. They are even used as wall decorations. But to imitate the eighteenth-century flirting and fluttering of fans would be an anachronism. Hand-mirrors of polished silver or bronze were also used to identify the great lady. As far as sunshades are concerned, although their construction seems to be

remarkably similar to a modern umbrella, they were not used or carried in the manner to which we are accustomed. They appear held over the heads, once more, of great persons, used, no doubt, as a movable awning which could be carried by a slave as a protection from the sun; not a thing to be toyed with or used as a walking-stick as those of our direct ancestors.



choruses, though we do know that in the *Suppliants* of Aeschylus there is a reference to these young women having dark-skinned. Probably the *Perians* were also. Each chorus must have had a sufficiently obvious type of mask to prevent them in any way from becoming involved with the main actors in the play.

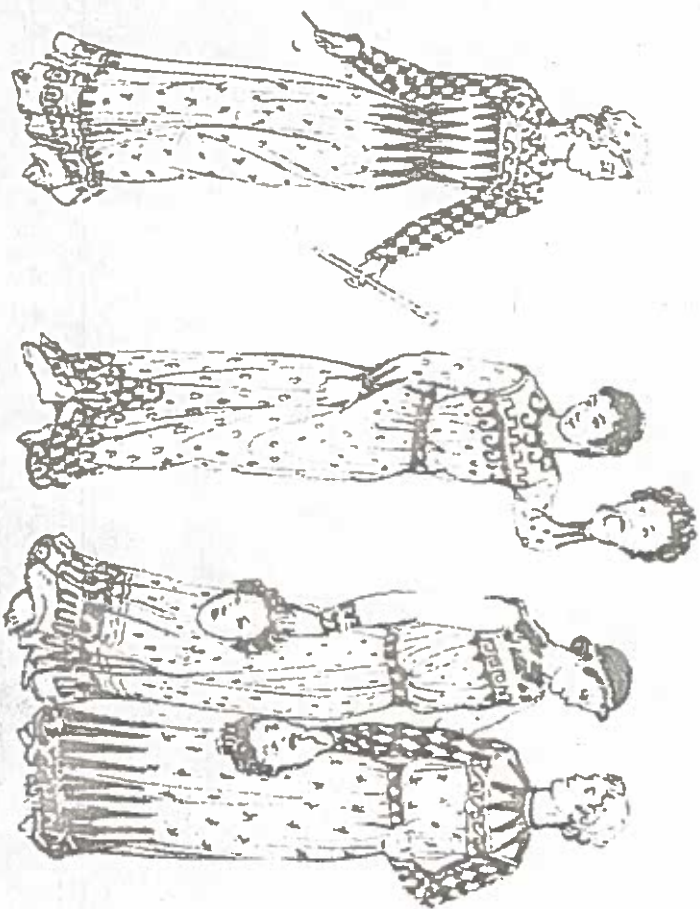


Fig. 39. Four of the female chorists represented in the Tarentum Fragments (fr. 93)

their purpose was for them to wear identical masks, though there does not seem to be any proof that costumes needed to be identical. So here again is a perfectly good *raison d'être* for the importance of the mask. We must remember that the vast open-air theatres, with their seating capacities for 17,000 and 14,000, would really need a clearly defined head with a simple formality about it that could be easily distinguished in the distance. The variety of colouring and features that occur normally in any collection of individuals could be best overcome by the use of masks.

We may assume that the early masks used by Aeschylus were neither exaggerated in expression nor size. Their colouring might, however, have been in some way distinguishing, whiter skin tone for women perhaps in normal

According to the fifth-century illustrations, then, the masks were not larger than life. They fitted the head closely and left no room for padding, for they not only covered the face but carried the ornate hair styles or headdress peculiar to the part played by the actor at that particular time. Thus a woman would appear with her hair dressed in the latest fashion if she were meant to represent a woman of fashion, or with her hair shorn if she were a character in mourning (e.g. Electra), with a crown or coronet if she were a queen, possibly with a flowing veil to cover her neck and shoulders, or with other useful defining headdress. Masks of old men were made with bald heads or long untidy white hair, and the masks of young men had flowing locks, carefully arranged or rolled up in the manner of fighting warriors.

A dramatic gesture that could be made was that of changing a mask to represent the same character under different circumstances. A frightening instance of this occurs in the *Oedipus Rex* when after he has stabbed his eyes Oedipus appears before the horrified audience in another mask bearing the same features with blood streaming from the sightless sockets. The same occasion arises during the performance of Euripides' *Cyclops*.

There were, of course, other types of masks to represent unearthly beings. Of these we have little information, but a well-designed mask, as I have already mentioned, could give an awful sense of terror to any audience. Such was the reputation of the Furies as they appear in Aeschylus' *Eumenides* that boys died of fright and women miscarried. The *Bacchantes* of Euripides are also described as having a terrifying appearance. They were wearing snakes and vine-leaves in their hair, which they had let down in their ecstasy. Other unearthly beings would, of course, include Io with horns and the Oceanids in *Prometheus*; the latter were water nymphs and probably wore their hair flowing. The satyr masks followed a convention of their own. These are so many illustrations of these creatures that there is little doubt that the masks worn to distinguish them were endowed with the same peculiarities. The skull was enlarged in front so that the

Headdresses

Whether masks are used or not, we must consider the styles of hairdressing that will give the right effect in any one particular play; for this a knowledge of the original hairdressing is necessary. Nothing looks quite so out of place as a modern coiffure worn with ancient costume; it turns the costume into a form of fancy dress and completely destroys any illusion of period.

Hairdressing in classic times was quite a fascinating and, apparently, time-consuming occupation. Such highly styled coiffures lent themselves readily to the designing of wigs for the masks, and the difference between the male and female could be accentuated in this manner, for we are now aware that the male and female costume was fundamentally the same. Women's styles are not in the least difficult to imitate, even if the hair is short, for a *sakkos* or little cap can be used to cover the entire head with the exception of a small curled fringe and some kind of sideboard or bunch of curls on the cheeks. If the hair is long or even shoulder-length there is immense variety in the ways in which it can be suitably arranged. Modern lacquer would undoubtedly be of the greatest use in this case, but hair can set both well and stiffly if it is applied about ten minutes before setting so that the malt has time to get slightly tacky.

There was a similarity between men's and women's hair styles; both favoured the effect of hair on the cheeks, a small curly fringe or the front hair set in a profusion of bubble curls. Women did not wear their hair loose as often as the men. There are, of course, many portraits of flowing hair, and in the fifth and early sixth centuries long hair arranged in crimped locks appears on the heads of gods and goddesses alike, but generally speaking the *sakkos* holds the women's hair in place. This headdress varies considerably from a crude headscarf tied on with cords or fillets (see Fig. 41) to a finely decorated cap with an ornamental tassel at the back or a tuft like a handle at the top. A gold fillet or diadem is often worn as a sort of frontal crown holding both the *sakkos* and the front hair in place. If the hair is worn down, as is that of the caryatids on the Erechtheum (Acropolis, Athens, and also one in the British Museum), the back part is twisted or plaited; each of these famous figures has her hair in a slightly



Fig. 41. Varieties of *sakkos*. Centre left: hair style from one of the caryatids at the Erechtheum, Athens

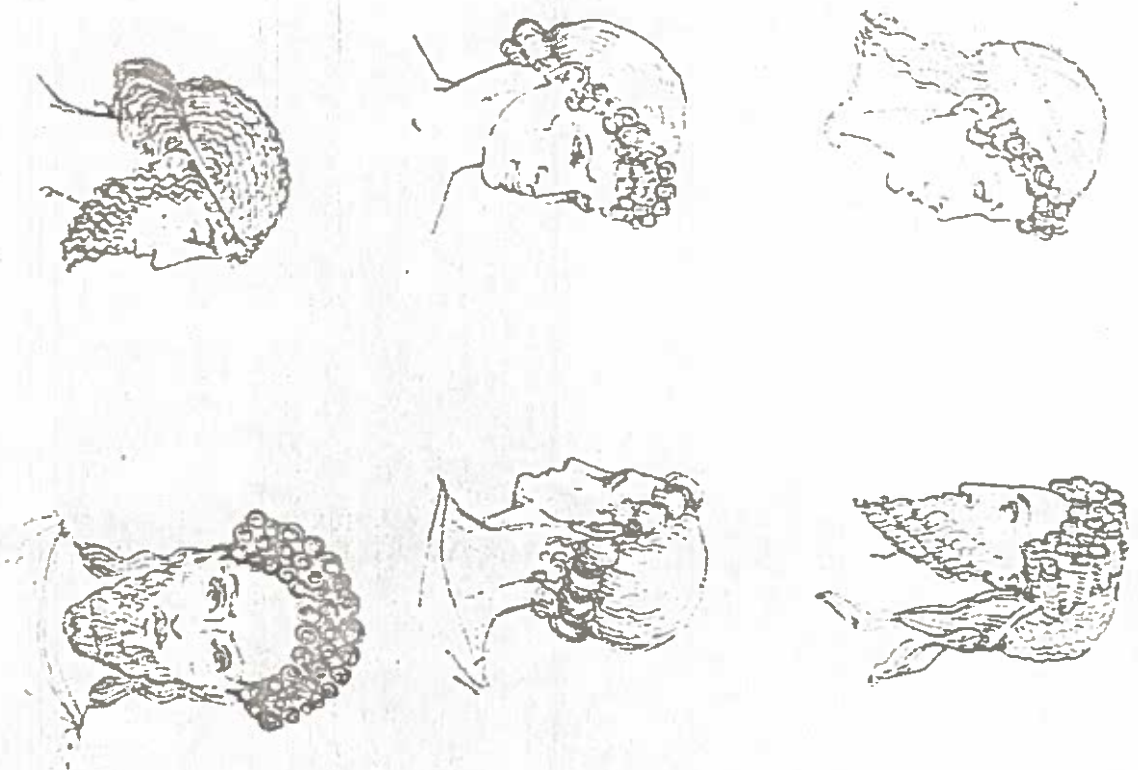


Fig. 43. Varieties of men's stylized hairdressing

of him; sometimes they are frisky and similar to what we now term Robin Hood, sometimes nearly flat like an inverted soup plate, sometimes like a pudding basin pulled well down over the eyes and ears. The nature of felt when pressed seems to produce a little point in the centre; this small tuft is visible in many of the vase paintings. All such hats were termed *petasos*. Another form of headgear was the Phrygian cap, light-fitting well down over the back

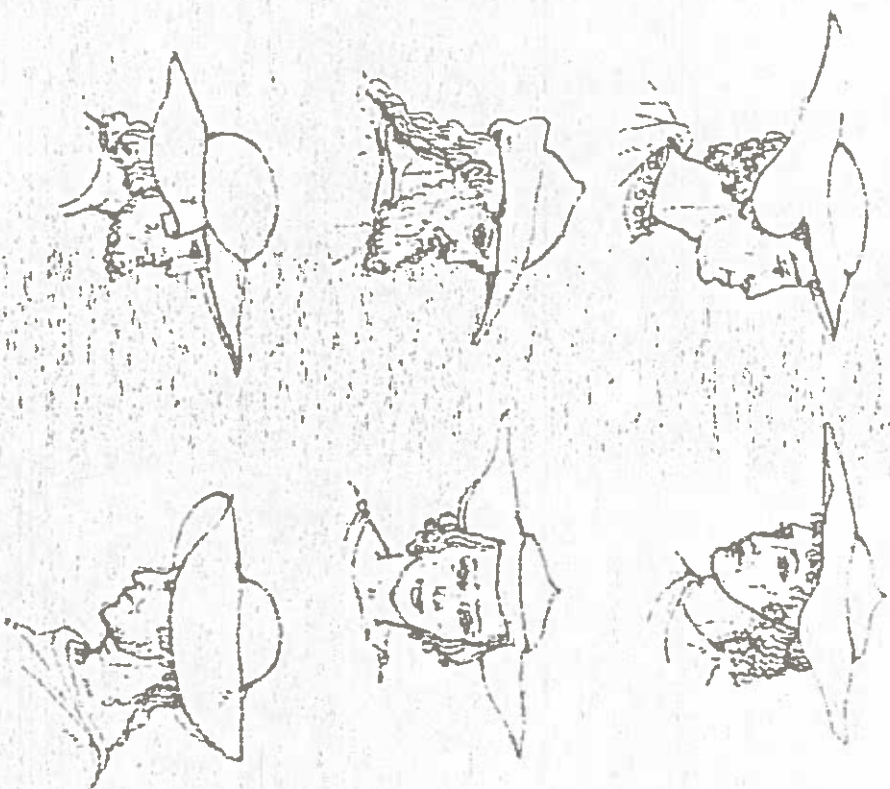


Fig. 44. Varieties of petasos or felt hats



Fig. 48. Possible varieties of dress for chorus. From left to right: Egyptian, young Greek, naiad, Greek, Egyptian or Libyan, Greek princess, Egyptian

flower and lotus bud and blossoming, the great ships that sailed the Nile, strange fishes and reeds, domestic animals such as cats and ducks all turn up over and over again.

Again, the chorus for the *Persians* should make a fascinating contrast to other choruses, for the Greeks were perfectly familiar with the Persian costume and probably dozens of artists used this difference of clothing purely for the sake of variety. Firstly, the Persians wore trousers, and in a land where these garments were unknown they were probably as provoking as a kilt would be to a Frenchman. Early fifth-century paintings show these trousers as loose and baggy, similar to the modern pyjama trousers, with gay spot patterns or stripes. Later illustrations make them skin-tight like ballet tights, finishing at the ankle and showing a bare foot or else having a short boot. The patterns are the predominant features in them; stripes and rings, spots and checks appear in dozens of different arrangements. A particularly wonderful vase in the Naples museum shows figures in some considerable detail and variety. The subject illustrates Persians bringing their taxes to Darius with the gods placed above and an heroic scene running round the neck of the vase. Each of the figures is some five or six inches in height, so that there is ample space for details of decoration of their clothing. It was painted somewhere around 340 B.C., but still faithfully reproduces the styles of Persian clothes indicated a century or more earlier. Persians fighting Greeks appear on vases as early as 570 B.C. We are therefore aware of their styles of clothes before Aeschylus wrote the *Persians*. Over their gaily coloured trousers they wore a short, patterned tunic with short sleeves to just above the elbow, and long sleeves from some under-garment, probably like a jersey, show beneath the shorter sleeves. If a cuirass was worn over the tunic it was very similar to the Greek breastplate with the familiar hanging leather straps or apron from the waist. Frequently they wore a leather helmet with a peak on top, vaguely Phrygian in shape but with long hanging pieces at the sides which apparently could be fastened under the chin like a child's bonnet; a flap covered the back of the neck and shoulders and sometimes there was yet another pair of hanging flaps over the ears. Their swords were short and wide, occasionally rather like a scimitar in design, always wider than the Greek sword, and this is a point of interest. They were apparently bowmen rather than spear-men; Aeschylus especially mentions this. A very fine painting on a little vase of the fifth century in the British Museum looks exactly like the figure of

There are also a number of illustrations depicting the Bacchantes or maenades joining in the ecstatic chase with Dionysus. A sense of violence and savagery must exist, for no formal chorus would in this case be the slightest use to the play. The following translation gives the instructions for the ecstatic dress: "I hebes, nurse of Semele, girdland yourself with ivy; deck yourself abundantly with green lovely-fruited smilax, and consecrate yourselves with sprigs of oak or fir and deck your cloaks of dappled faun-skin with white curls of braided wool. And be reverent in your handling of the violent wands" (l. 105 ff.). Again (l. 695) the messenger describes the women working on the hillside and how the madness affected them: "... and first they let down their hair about their shoulders and hoisted up their garments if the fastening was undone, and girded their dappled faun-skins with snakes which licked their cheeks..."

In many of the pictures of the ecstatic dance, the maenades or Bacchantes are wearing the very full and pleated Ionic chiton. This sort of dress if it could be arranged successfully would without doubt add to the sense of disorder. The very fact of hitching up their garments would produce the uneven hemlines which do quite naturally give an effect of abandon and almost drunken carelessness.

The Phoenician women would probably have been represented in some form of oriental costume, possibly similar to the Asiatic style that Metheba (p. 69) usually wears. On the other hand they could equally well wear the Egyptian type of dress worn by the Danaids (see Fig. 48).



Fig. 51. Bacchant with thyrsus

Aristophanes is the only one of the dramatists who introduces animals and clouds into his choruses. Some of these unexpected beings might conceivably have had their inspiration from examples of archaic ornament or even from the animal-headed pictures of gods and goddesses of ancient Egypt. Whatever their origin we must look for our inspiration in design to those pictures that might



Fig. 52. Dionysus and Bacchantes with faun skins and snakes

have been available in Aristophanes' lifetime. The *Wasps*, we are told, really are dressed as wasps: "I look well at us and you will see that we have all the character and habits of a wasp." They wear wasp waists and stings, so no doubt their masks were equally appropriate, but we are also given to understand that they wear cloaks, for when preparing to do battle they cry, "Come, children, cast your cloaks to the wind, run, shout!..."